

SCHOOL STATEMENT FOR HEALTHFUL EATING

INTRODUCTION

Food and nutrition are integral to a student's educational experience. A child's academic and physical performance, attendance, and attention span are related to personal health and well being. Current research indicates that access to a variety of foods in amounts necessary to support growth and development is vital to a student's health and well being.

School meals should be prepared in ways that ensure a balance between good nutrition and student preferences while meeting the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Emphasis should be placed on increasing the variety of food offered, while reducing the fat, sodium, and sugar. To ensure acceptance, menu changes should be gradual, and the nutritional value of school meals or a student's dietary intake should be evaluated over a week's time.

Each school is encouraged to implement a statement or policy that creates an environment to develop a healthful lifestyle and to enhance a student's ability to reach full academic and physical potential. It should encompass all food sold or served anywhere in the school during school hours including classroom parties, birthday celebrations, and field trips. Representatives of the entire school community should participate in the development of the policy including the principal, school nutrition director, a teacher, school nurse, parent, student, food service staff member, and/or dietitian. The school health advisory committee would be a good resource.

GUIDELINES

The statement should reflect the current knowledge of the nutritional needs of students and emphasize foods that make an important contribution to those needs. It should include:

Educational Experiences that--

- integrate nutrition education into the curriculum.
- promote the development of critical thinking skills in making healthful lifestyle choices.
- involve parents, teachers, food service personnel, principals, the community and the media.
- provide for the active involvement of the students.
- promote physical activities throughout the school day.
- provide positive role models and supervision.

An Environment that --

- is comfortable, sanitary, and safe.
- provides adequate time to eat.
- provides for physical activity.
- offers foods that do not compete nutritionally or financially with school meals.
- offers foods for special activities that are nutritionally sound.

Access to Food and Nutrition Services that --

- meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and reflect the Food Guide Pyramid recommendations.
- provide reasonable choices that are appealing to students.
- are integrated into the total educational experience of the students.
- provide an opportunity to practice healthful dietary choices.
- encourage children to experience a variety of new and familiar foods
- support diversity.
- create a learning laboratory within the cafeteria.
- provide for the special nutritional needs of children.

Any food available to students, in addition to meals, should be thoughtfully selected to ensure optimal nutritional quality and foster healthful eating habits. Points to consider in choosing what foods to offer in the school are:

- Is the food a source of valuable nutrients, such as fruit, cheese, ice cream/ice milk, puddings, and some types of cookies?
- Does the food have little or no processing, such as fresh fruit, raw vegetables with low fat dip, canned fruit juices, raisins, or nuts?
- Does the food contribute to the meal pattern such as pizza or sandwiches?

A "yes" to any of the following questions would be an indicator that the food item may not make a significant contribution to a child's nutritive needs as compared to its calorie content.

- Is the first ingredient some type of sugar?
- Are there several types of sugar listed in the ingredients?
- Is the drink carbonated (carbonated drinks are forbidden by regulation during the school lunch and breakfast programs)?
- Do more than 35 percent of the calories come from fat?

For further information, please contact the Virginia Department of Education, School Nutrition Programs, at (804) 225-2074.

Adapted from: Teams for Healthy Kids, United States Department of Agriculture
American School Food Service Association Policy for Nutrition Integrity,
1992